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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000420

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN --
COUNTERING CHAVEZ' ANTI-AMERICANISM

Classified By: CLASSIFIED CONFIDENTIAL BY ACTING DCM
ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES FOR REASON 1.4 (d).

11. (U) This is an action request - see paragraph 12.

12. (C) Summary: Embassy Caracas requests DOD support in the execution of its strategic communications plan. The goal for this program is to influence the information environment within Venezuela. The strategy's goal is to counter the active and deliberate campaign by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) to instill in the population a negative perception of the US. and distort more than 100 years of close and mutually beneficial relations between our two countries. Regrettably, the BRV has had some success. From a pre-Chavez level of over 65% approval, today the positive image of the US has fallen to a historic low of 31% in Venezuela. DOD support would greatly enhance existing Embassy Public Diplomacy and pro-democracy activities. End Summary.

13. (C) Venezuela at the Crossroads: Venezuela once ranked with Colombia and the Central American countries as being most favorably disposed to the United States. However, attitudes towards America have deteriorated after several years of daily, well-funded BRV attacks against the USG.

14. (C) Recent Developments: Embassy Caracas has developed a comprehensive strategic communications plan that incorporates various agencies within the mission. The Narcotic Affairs Section (NAS) has implemented a successful baseball clinic bringing former Venezuelan players and managers from the US major leagues to work with the youth in various Venezuelan cities as part of a narcotics demand reduction program. In addition, the Public Affairs Office targets the hard-to-penetrate youth and low-income sectors, programming Embassy leadership visits to all regions of Venezuela to interact with Venezuelan society, business, and civilian organizations. All of these programs have had an impact on Venezuelan perceptions towards the US within targeted sectors. Lack of resources limits our ability to reach a much larger population base.

15. (C) Objectives: The strategic communications plan focuses on three key objectives; strengthening Venezuelan-US friendship, informing Venezuelans of enduring ties with America, and countering anti-US influence and activity. The US government needs to remind the Venezuelan people of its historic friendship ("We have been with you since Simon Bolivar") through continuous engagement, either with goodwill activities or offers of US assistance for emergency situations. We should also develop a message to enhance Venezuelan understanding of its natural partnership with the US through our long history of mutual support, strong commercial and agricultural ties, and the cultural and people to people links--large numbers of Venezuelan immigrants live in US ("We have been allies since the 1800s"). Finally, this strategic communications program must demonstrate commitment

and support to the shared values and aspirations of the Venezuelan and American people regardless of Chavez' hostility or harsh rhetoric in order to counter anti-US influence and activity ("Both our nations stand for freedom, democracy, and prosperity.").

¶6. (U) Themes: This program will center principally on three themes:

The United States and Venezuela share common interests;
--- Strong commercial and human ties.
--- Both of our peoples respect and value civil and individual rights.

Regional problems require the cooperation of all neighbors;
--- Drug trafficking affects all countries and can only be effectively addressed through regional cooperation.
--- Organized crime, international gangs, and trafficking in persons affect every society and are strongly correlated to peace and stability.

Long historical and cultural ties;
--- Wars for independence.
--- Support to Venezuela against European intervention in the late 1800s.
--- Baseball
--- Large number of Venezuelan-American citizens.

¶7. (C) Standards: Three continuous threads will be woven throughout this proposed program. First, the absolute veracity of the information will be assured prior to any program being publicized or aired. This standard will be in direct contrast to the misinformation, broken promises, and exaggerations of the Chavez administration. The second is a commitment to sending only positive messages about people. Negative messages tend to become associated with the sender. The third standard is to refrain from any attacks against the BRV or Chavez that would provide a pretext for Chavez to rally Venezuelans against "the empire."

¶8. (C) Concept of Operations: The Embassy would like to begin operations May 2008 and continue through April 2009. If the program is determined to be successful through attitude polling metrics, then the Embassy will seek funding for a second year. The first phase would consist of information gathering - surveying the environment to determine attitudes and opinions about the US, drugs, and corruption, and other areas in Venezuela that affect people in their everyday lives.

¶9. (C) Based on these findings, in the second phase we would implement a campaign using newspaper ads, billboards, radio and TV spots. Embassy Caracas would focus their resources on key population areas of Venezuela and states outside the Caracas metropolitan area. Follow-on phases would include rock concerts, sporting events, and musical festivals. The final phase would converge on Caracas and concentrate on sending the message of our continued support to the Venezuelan people.

¶10. (C) The Embassy will evaluate the effectiveness of the program through feedback surveys. In order to gauge the program's long term effects a survey team will return to the target area between 90 and 120 days after the execution of the program. That will give time to the target audience to "digest" our message and show indications that they are either accepting or rejecting our message.

¶11. (C) Operational Timeline for the Strategic Communications Plan

10-25 May - 1st Phase (Site Survey)

1 June-30 August-2nd Phase (centered on outlying states)

1 September-25 December 2nd Phase (Sporting events and musical tours)

1 Jan 2009-30 April 2009-3rd Phase (Caracas focused)

¶12. (C) Action Request - Embassy requests support from Department of Defense in the execution of its Strategic Communications Plan. The embassy would like resources available by Mid-May 2008.

¶13. (SBU) US Embassy-Caracas points of contact:
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